

For Immediate Release

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Conservation Security Program Informational Meetings Scheduled for Hondo Watershed

The Hondo Watershed is one of only 18 watersheds in the nation selected this year for USDA's newest program – the Conservation Security Program (CSP). The Hondo Watershed consists of portions of Medina, Uvalde, Bandera and Frio counties. The CSP program is designed to financially reward farmers and ranchers who have already achieved the highest level of management to conserve natural resources on their lands.

CSP is open to all qualified agricultural producers in the Hondo Watershed. To find out if your farm or ranch will qualify for CSP and to receive information about the application process, you are encouraged to attend one of the upcoming CSP Informational Meetings in your area. The meetings are scheduled for:

- June 29 – Hondo Civic Center, 1014 18th St., 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.
- June 29 – Bandera Ag Center, 2454 Hwy 16 North, 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.
- June 30 – Hondo Civic Center, 1014 18th St., 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.
- June 30 – Pearsall, Security State Bank, 100 N. Oak, 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.

On June 9, 2004, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced the release of an interim final rule to implement the Conservation Security Program. Sign-up for the CSP

will be available to qualifying farmers and ranchers in the Hondo Watershed July 6 to July 30, 2004.

According to the interim final rule, all CSP applications that meet the sign-up criteria will be placed in an enrollment category. Categories will consider the applicants' current level of stewardship (soil condition and trend and the existence of support practices and activities) and will examine producers' willingness to perform more conservation activities during their CSP contract to provide additional environmental performance.

Payments can include four components: 1) an annual stewardship component for the benchmark conservation treatment, 2) an annual component for maintenance of existing conservation practices, 3) a one-time new practice component for specific additional needed practices, and 4) an enhancement component for exceptional conservation effort. For most producers the enhancement component will be the largest component. Payments will be received under three tiers of conservation contracts. Payments for the three tiers are capped at \$20,000, \$35,000 and \$45,000 annually and will last for five years for Tier I and 5-10 years for Tier II and Tier III. Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman will select the highest ranking categories to be funded. Additional information on the CSP including the interim final rule is available at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/CSP_Interim_Final_Rule6.14.pdf.

For more information about the public meetings scheduled for the Hondo Watershed, contact Phillip Wright with the NRCS at (830) 426-3198 or visit the Texas CSP Web Site at www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/program/CSP/csp.html.